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AN

# ESSAY ON MUSIC.

PRONOUNCED BEFORE

THE MIDDLESEX MUSICAL SOCIETY,

SEPT. 9, A. D. 1807,

AT

DUNSTABLE, (MASS.)

—○○○○—  
BY JOHN HUBBARD,

PROF. MATH. AND NAT. PHIL. DARTMOUTH COLLEGE.  
—○○○○—

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF SAID SOCIETY.

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AN

## ESSAY ON MUSIC.



**TO** alleviate the innumerable calamities of human life, to soothe and calm the boisterous passions, to light up the emotions of love and friendship, to elevate and inspire the mind with true devotion, to give us some foretaste of those sublime pleasures enjoyed by the celestial choirs, is the office and effect of music :—

*" She, heavenly born, came down to earth,  
" When from God's eternal throne  
" The beam of all-creative wisdom shone,  
" And spake fair order into birth.  
" At wisdom's call, she rob'd yon glittering skies,  
" Attun'd the spheres, and taught consenting orbe to rise.  
" Angels wrapt in wonder stood,  
" And saw that all was fair, and all was good."\**

When music was first introduced into our world, cannot possibly be determined. "When the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy," man, in his state of innocence, must have caught the divine ardor. His soul, elevated with devotion, would naturally express its feelings in the simple music of nature.

What progress was made in this art by the antediluvians, must forever remain unknown to us their descendants. Their improvements are buried with them in everlasting oblivion. If Jubal could construct the complex harp and organ, he must have been considerably skilled in the science of music. Instrumental music is never introduced till vocal has gained a considerable degree of perfection.

\* The Cure of Saul, a Sacred Ode, by Dr. Brown. Page 19.

Instruments are designed to imitate the voice; the extent, tones, and modulations of the voice must therefore be known before they can be imitated. The most rude and uncultivated savages are not without their songs, though destitute of musical instruments.

In the time of Moses we find Miriam, the prophetess, leading the choir of Israelitish women, in songs of praise to their great deliverer, and accompanying their voices with the timbrel.\* We likewise find, that the song of Moses was written in poetry, undoubtedly for the purpose of being sung by the choirs of Israelites. But the Jewish music does not appear to have obtained its greatest perfection till the inspired son of Jesse assumed the harp. In his and his son's reign, it arrived at its highest degree of perfection. Here we find it employed in uttering the devout effusions of the heart, and rendering praises to the great JEHOVAH. Nor were the heathen ignorant of this noble art. From the holy altar of the Jews, they snatched a spark of the sacred fire, and prostituted it to the service of their gods. But even in this servitude, her powers were considered as almost unbounded. Orpheus, while celebrating the praises of his false deities on his harp, could move the inanimate world with his music.

In treating upon music, we shall consider it both as an art and a science. As an art, it depends upon the powers, abilities, and genius of the writer. As an art, it cannot be limited, or restricted within any particular rules. The genius, the feelings, and the improved taste of mankind, must regulate every good writer. Like the painter, the sculptor, the architect and the poet, nature and propriety must direct the effusions of his mind. As a science, it is regulated by measure, harmony, cadence, accent, mode, &c. Science may invent good harmony, agreeable measure, flowing and easy cadence; but genius only can give force and energy to music.

We shall consider the essential parts or divisions of music, as consisting of *melody, harmony, expression, and accent.*

Melody consists in placing a simple series of notes at such intervals in the musical scale, as to please the ear, and captivate the heart. No rules can be prescribed for this part of music. It is the genuine feeling of the heart, regulated and directed by the ear and the understanding. In this, nature alone can

\* The Hebrew word **תֶּפֶן**, which is translated **TIMBREL**, is derived from the verb **תִּפֶּן**, which signifies to smite repeatedly, or to beat a drum. The timbrel was an instrument of the drum kind, and only used to accompany the voice. This circumstance will likewise shew the state of music among the Jews at that time.

be our guide. Reduce melody to certain rules, and it becomes a body without animation. Our beneficent Creator has implanted within us a certain aptitude, to be pleased or displeased with particular sensible objects. This innate principle, when matured by judgment, reason, and experience, is our only guide in judging of the perfection or imperfection of melody. The writer of melody may imitate nature, but the modulations must be the effusions of his own mind. The painter takes the proportions of his picture from nature; but the expressions of the countenance are from his own mind.

As all men have similar feelings, similar passions, and similar propensities, that which will be agreeable to any individual, when well informed, will, in some degree, be acceptable to every person. Common opinion will thus form a standard for melody, from which no writer will dare appeal.

The effects of melody on the mind and feelings are various and extensive. It soothes our sorrows, rouses our passions, excites our sympathy, calms our fears, and kindles our martial ardor. The most perfect models of melody are frequently found among the common ballads of a nation. Nothing can excel the beauty, simplicity, and melody of the Scottish airs. Their excellence is unrivalled, and their effects incalculable. No art can improve them; no harmony could render them more engaging. To add a second to them, would be as impossible as to add a new colour to the rainbow.

If our observations on melody be correct, we shall infer, that the perfection of music does not depend upon the number of parts, but upon the perfection of the part or parts written. On this subject, unskilled composers have made many mistakes. Supposing music imperfect, unless consisting of several parts, they have added counterpoint, bases, and seconds to many pieces of music, utterly incapable of receiving any such auxiliaries. "Restless man knows no golden mean, but will be attempting innovations without end."\* When any particular passion is to be excited, great musical writers have uniformly attempted it by a simple air. Here the writer has full latitude for using every appropriate expression. "Melody reaches the heart; and it is by this chiefly that a sentiment is enforced, or a passion soothed."† The writer's accompaniment will, therefore, be nothing more than an auxiliary, in supporting the voice of the performer.

\* Encyclopædia, Vol. II. page 362.

† Ibid.





no moon," in the same Oratorio.\* Such is the melody, such the expression of these airs, that even the writer could not hear them performed without tears. They penetrate the deepest recesses of our hearts, nor can we hear them

God, return, O God of hosts, Behold, behold thy servant in distress.

Oratorio of Samson. Page 35.

\* *Sym.*  
*Larghetto e Staccato.*

Total eclipse! No sun, no moon! All dark, all dark, amidst the blaze of noon!

*Piano.*

*Sym.*

O glorious light, no cheering ray, To glad my eyes with

*f. p.* *f. p.*

*Sym.*

welcome day. Total eclipse! No sun, no moon! All dark amidst the

*f.* *2.*

without feeling a sympathetic emotion. Add another part, and you will divide the attention; and, as you divide the attention to the different parts, you diminish the effect.

The great effects of music among the ancients, as related by their writers, are not altogether fabulous. Their music consisted of those simple airs, which steal imperceptibly on the mind.\* If the son of Jesse could control the ragings of his sovereign by the simple inflexions of his harp, why might not Orpheus perform equal wonders in Greece? Even in our days, the full choir is frequently neglected, to hear the simple modulations of an itinerant bard.†

Harmony consists in a series of notes, placed at such intervals in the musical scale, as to produce agreeable sensations in the ear.‡ Whether harmony has been any real improvement to music, has been questioned by many learned critics. It may please the ear; it may feast and delight the appetite; but can never communicate any distinct ideas. The full choir, for a few moments, may animate the mind; and the movements of a full band may excite agreeable emotions. The Grand Hallelujah of Handel, in the Messiah, § will almost



Oratorio of Samson. Page 17.

\* Knox's Essay on Music. Page 299.

† "If we were to suppose a Giardini condescending to play at a rural fair, there is little doubt but his audience would be stolen away from him by the itinerant performer on a Scotch bagpipe." Knox's Essay on Music. Page 295.

‡ See the Encyclopædia. Vol. VIII. page 381.

§ See the Grand Hallelujah in the Messiah. Page 67, Fol.

imperceptibly waft us to heaven.\* Such sublime choruses are well calculated to rouse our devotion, and fix the mind, for a short time, in the raptures of adoration. But even here, limits are fixed. The mind soon wishes for a relaxation. Soon cloyed with the full blaze of harmony, it seeks a more simple repast. Melody here presents herself, and affords the desired relief.

As harmony depends entirely on mathematical calculation and experience, genius cannot be so much displayed in this part of the musical art, as in some others. Any person of decent abilities may write good harmony. It is the same in music as proportion in painting. The proportion may be correct, and the picture entirely destitute of life. The same may happen in music. Good harmony cannot constitute any expression. Indeed, the more perfect the harmony, the less effect will the expression have on the mind.†

Expression, in music, is the particular method in which a writer communicates his ideas.‡ It is in music, what the countenance is in painting and sculpture. It is that which gives life and energy to all good music, and without which it becomes insipid and uninteresting. Like melody, it has no limits, nor can it be reduced within any rules but those of nature. Taste, sanctioned by the general consent of mankind, must be the only standard. As this is one of the most important articles in composition, as in the hands of great writers, it is the life and soul of music, so in the hands of pedants, and the ignorant, it is most shockingly prostituted. While the noble expressions of those great masters excite our admiration, the counterfeit efforts of the unskilful excite our contempt and disgust. In the hands of a great genius, expression appears to be the natural effusion and feeling of the heart; in the hands of the ignorant, it appears to be the forced cries of a bewildered imagination, aiming at something incomprehensible.

Many composers have supposed that music was so far imitative, that almost any idea might be expressed by some particular run of notes. Upon this supposition, such writers have introduced the most ridiculous imitations imagination could invent, upon the words *flying, dying, crying, &c.*§ If the notes, without

\* See Dr. Beattie on Music and Poetry.

† "These compositions tickle the ear by the luxury of complicated sounds, but seldom make any impressions on the heart." *Encyclopædia*, Vol. II. page 363.

‡ See the *Musical Dictionary*, under the word "Expression."

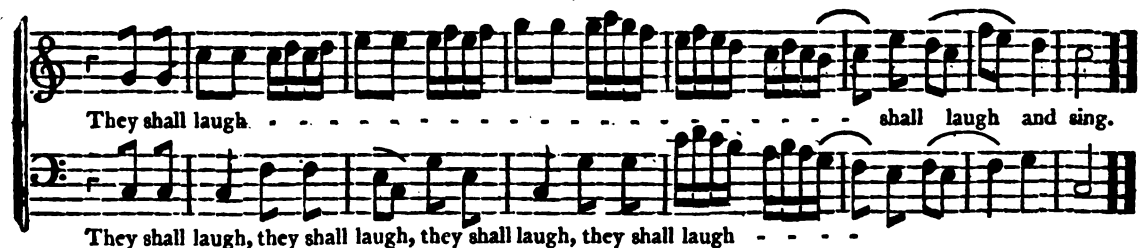
§ See Dr. Beattie on Musical Expression; likewise Dr. Brown's *Dissertation on Poetry and Music*. Page 219.

the words, do not communicate the idea, the addition of the words cannot render them imitations. If a performer were to run over tied notes till he lost his breath, no one who heard him would suppose he was about to *fly*, or think of the word *to fly*; yet almost every unskilled composer has expressed this word by a long rant of tied notes. Such attempts at imitation have no foundation in nature, are mean and insipid, and debase the music with which they are connected.

It is certain that but few, very few distinct ideas can be represented by any arrangements of notes. The language of music, when destitute of words, must ever be ambiguous. What natural connexion can possibly subsist between a low note and the word *bell*? or a high note and the word *heaven*? Imitations of this kind are a burlesque on common sense, and a species of musical buffoonery. A striking instance of this kind of imitation may be found on the word *ring*, in a piece of music called "Ascension," and frequently published in this country.\* Another specimen, equally ridiculous, may be found in an Anthem, "*Thou, O God, art praised in Sion*," on the word *laugh*.†



See Village Harmony, 5th edition, page 54. The observations made on this passage are not meant to detract from the general merit of the tune. The writer considers it as being above mediocrity, and containing some excellent expressions.



Suppose a broad, theatrical ha! ha! ha! could be imitated in sacred music; would it be proper? Does true devotion ever assume such airs or gesticulations?

A third may be found on the word *roar*, in a piece of music called "Rainbow." \*

From such puerile attempts at imitation, we will turn to those of real merit. Whenever we hear those plaintive notes of David, weeping over the slaughtered king of Israel, and his beloved friend Jonathan, we are compelled to mix our tears with his. The notes of this excellent air, in the Oratorio of Saul, "*In sweetest harmony they liv'd,*" cannot be heard without exciting the idea of sorrow in our minds.† In Alexander's feast, Handel has likewise given us an

\*

And tempests cease to roar - - - - -

And tempests cease to roar - - - - -

thy command, And tempests cease to roar - - - - -

calm at thy command, And tempests cease to roar.

This musical score consists of four staves. The first three staves are vocal parts, and the fourth is a basso continuo part. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The lyrics are: "And tempests cease to roar - - - - -", "And tempests cease to roar - - - - -", "thy command, And tempests cease to roar - - - - -", and "calm at thy command, And tempests cease to roar."

This is roaring with a witness! The author should have read Dean Swift's burlesque upon the comedians of his day: "The Duke shall cry, *Encore, encore, let him roar, let him roar, once more, once more!!*"

†

*A Tempo Giusto.*

*Sym.* *Sym.*

In sweetest harmony they liv'd, Nor death, nor death their union could divide.

In sweetest harmony they liv'd, Nor death, nor death their union could divide, Nor death their union.

This musical score consists of two systems of two staves each. The first system is for a vocal part and a basso continuo part. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The lyrics are: "In sweetest harmony they liv'd, Nor death, nor death their union could divide." The second system is for a vocal part and a basso continuo part. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The lyrics are: "In sweetest harmony they liv'd, Nor death, nor death their union could divide, Nor death their union."



expression, perfectly conformable to the sentiment, on these words, "*And sigh'd, and look'd, and sigh'd again.*" \*

could divide. The pious son ne'er left his father's side, But him defending, but him de-

fending, bravely, bravely, bravely dy'd. The pious son ne'er left his father's side, But him de-

fending, but him defending, but him defending, bravely, bravely, bravely dy'd; A loss too

great, a loss too great to be surviv'd, A loss too great, too great to be surviv'd.

See Handel's Oratorio of Saul. Page 92, Fol.

The prince, unable to conceal his pain, Gaz'd on the fair, Who caus'd his care, And sigh'd, and look'd,

Great masters have not generally attempted imitations on particular words, but on general ideas. This they have effected by the general movement and construction of their airs. Thus Handel, in the Ode on St. Cecilia's day, has imitated the roll of the drum on these words; "*The double, double beat of the thundering drum cries, hark!*" \* The notes comprised in this strain, cannot be repeated without exciting the idea comprised in the words. In his songs in L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, after the words,

"And let the merry bells ring round,  
"And the jocund rebecks sound,"



sigh'd, and look'd, sigh'd, and look'd, and sigh'd again. Gaz'd on the fair, Who caus'd his care, And  
sigh'd, and look'd, and sigh'd again, sigh'd, look'd, sigh'd, and look'd, sigh'd, and look'd, and sigh'd again.

See Alexander's Feast, an Oratorio. Page 32, Fol.

\*



The double, double, double beat of the thund'ring drum, of the thund'ring drum cries, hark! hark! hark!  
Hark! the foes come! Charge! :||: :||: :||: 'Tis too late to retreat, 'Tis too late to retreat, 'Tis too late to retreat.

See the Ode for St. Cecilia's day. Page 11, Fol.

D

he very happily changes to the air of a dance on these words ;

*"To many a youth, and many a maid,  
"Dancing in the chequer'd shade."\**

Such general movements may be perfectly imitative of general ideas, but can never designate those which are particular.

The question may now occur, What does good music imitate? We may answer this question by asking another. What does good poetry, painting, or architecture imitate? It may be answered, They imitate nature, improved by art. The same may be said of music. What does Handel imitate in that chorus of the Messiah, "*Break forth into joy, glad tidings,*" † but the soul enraptured with true devotion? What does Giardini imitate in "*Cambridge,*" upon these words, "*And on the wings of every hour, we read thy patience still,*" ‡ but a mind elevated with gratitude? We cannot hear such strains of music with indifference. They insensibly arrest our feelings. Even vice itself must listen to them.

Accent, in vocal music, may be defined, the placing of the notes in that manner which shall coincide with the various emphases of the words to be sung. The common rules of pronunciation are sufficient for our direction in this part of musical science. Propriety and sense ought never to be sacrificed to caprice and fancy.

In the writers of music we find the same variety of style, as in poetry or prose, viz. ; the *sublime*, the *beautiful*, the *nervous*, the *concise*, the *dry*, and the *bombastic*.

\*  
*Andante Allegro.* 3 3 3 3

To many a youth, and many a maid, Dancing in the chequer'd shade, Dancing in the chequer'd shade.

See L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. Page 23, Fol.

† See the Messiah. Page 58, Folio. This grand chorus is too long to be inserted.

‡ See Cambridge, as published by Dr. Madan in Lock Chapel. Page 111, Folio.

Few writers have given us specimens of the sublime. Amongst these, Handel undoubtedly stands first.\* His Grand Hallelujah, and his Chorus, "*Breathe forth into joy*," in the Messiah, are excellent specimens of this style. Giardini has likewise given us some specimens in "*Cambridge*;" especially on the words, "*Father, how wide thy glories shine*," &c: and on these, "*But when we view thy great designs*," &c.† In performing such strains, the mind is lost in admiration. It is almost incapable of contemplating the great ideas thus presented. Like the sublime in nature, our astonishment incapacitates us for reflecting upon the object before our eyes. The sublime in music knows no medium. The writer who attempts this, must either reach sublimity, or sink to indifference. Sublime compositions must be simple, unstudied, expressive, and connected with some great and important idea.

The specimens we might produce of the *beautiful*, are very numerous. They ravish, they charm, they transport us beyond conception. In this style Handel is excellent. His air in the Messiah, "*I know that my Redeemer liveth*,"‡ is,

\* "Handel stands eminent, in his greatness and sublimity of style." See Dr. Brown's dissertation on poetry and music. Page 214.

† Were it necessary, we might exhibit several other instances of the sublime from A. Williams, from Dr. S. Arnold, H. Purcell, and many others.

‡ *Larghetto.* *Sym.*

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the

lat - - - ter day - - - upon the earth. I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that

he shall stand - - - at the latter day upon the earth - - - upon the

perhaps, equal to any now extant. Pergolesi, in his air, "*Eja, mater, fons amoris*," in his "*Stabat Mater*," is beautiful beyond description.\*

Passing over other styles, a discussion of which would afford very little amusement, we come to the *bombastic*. This style, in poetry and in prose, consists in

earth. I know that my Re - deemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the

lat - - - ter day upon the earth - - - - - upon the earth.

See the Messiah. Page 71, Fol.

Eja, mater, fons a - mo - ris, fons a - mo - ris, Me sen - ti - re vim do - lo - ris,

vim do - lo - ris, Fac ut tecum lu - ge - am, lu - ge - am. Eja, mater,

fons a - mo - ris, fons a - mo - ris, Me sen - ti - re vim do - lo - ris, vim do - - - lo - ris.

attempting to magnify those subjects which are trifling or indifferent; or in using high sounding words and epithets without any great or noble ideas. In music it consists in laboured notes and strains, disconnected from any exalted ideas; or in attempting to communicate some low idea which cannot be expressed by notes. In this style, our unfortunate country has been peculiarly fruitful.\* Almost every pedant, after learning his eight notes, has commenced author. With a genius, sterile as the deserts of Arabia, he has attempted to rival the great masters of music. On the leaden wings of dullness, he has attempted to soar into those regions of science, never penetrated but by real genius. From such distempered imaginations, no regular productions can be expected. The unhappy writers, after torturing every note in the octave, have fallen into oblivion, and have generally outlived their insignificant works.† To the great injury of true religion, this kind of music has been introduced into our places of public worship. Devotion, appalled by its destructive presence, has fled from the unhallowed sound.

Among the most prominent faults of this style, we may reckon the common fuge. As the intention of vocal music is to communicate ideas, whatever renders those ideas indistinct or obscure, must be a perversion. Let us now examine music of the style last mentioned. We shall here find four parts, in harmonic order, each, at the same time, pronouncing different words. As a striking instance of this impropriety, we will mention a fuge in a piece of music called "Montague." Beginning at the Bass, and proceeding up to the Treble, the bar, in the four parts, pronounced at the same time, will read thus; "of



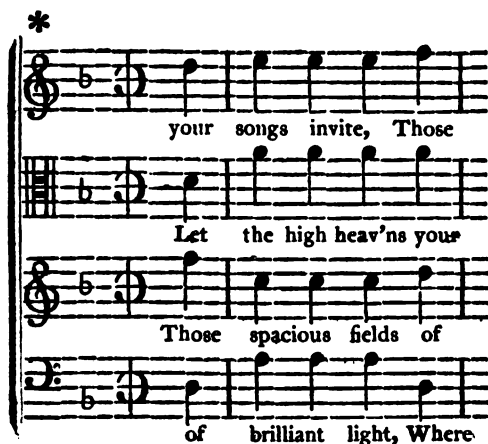
See Stabat Mater. Page 9. Fol. Many other examples might be produced from Dr. Arnold, from Worgan, Dr. Charles Burney, Millgrove, and others too numerous to mention.

\* This observation is not applicable to all the writers of music in this country. Several have composed music in an agreeable and appropriate style. Some have been so fortunate as to reach the sublime.

† No other proof of this fact need be adduced, than the ephemeral publications with which New England has been inundated. Many of these have never lived to see a second edition; and nearly all have become obsolete in a few years. Good music, good painting, good poetry, never grow old.



*brilliant light ;*” “*Those spacious fields ;*” “*Let the high heav’ns ;*” and “*your songs invite.*” The four emphases will fall on the words, “*brilliant,*” “*spacious,*” “*the,*” and “*songs.*”<sup>\*</sup> To catch any idea from such a chaos of words, uttered at the same instant of time, a hearer must be furnished with ears as numerous as the eyes of Argus. Such fuges must be a perversion.<sup>†</sup> They cannot affect the heart, nor inform the understanding.<sup>‡</sup> Though the performers may be admired for their dexterity, they can never excite any devout feelings in their hearers. Such music can never be of more consequence than an oration well pronounced in an unknown language.

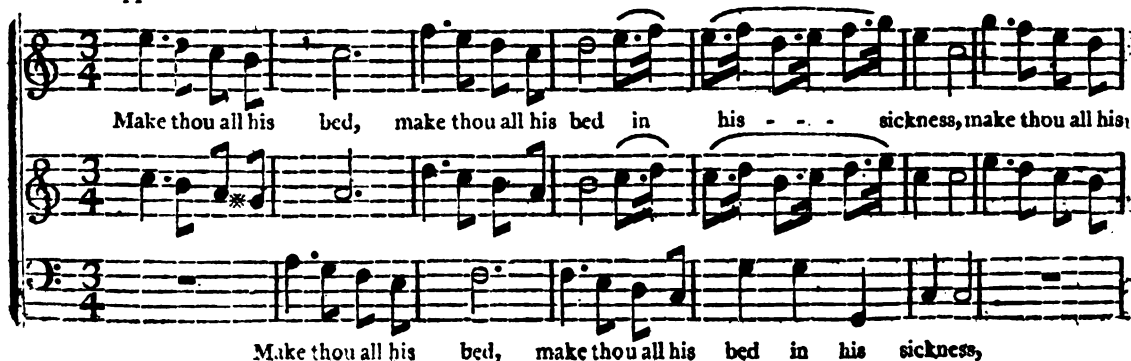


See the fourth bar from the repeat. In a fuge like this, all the force of emphasis must be entirely lost ; and, though the parts may be placed in harmonic order, yet their combined effect cannot exhibit any regular idea. When the parts of music move in unison with the words, the ideas are rendered more emphatical. When the different parts are pronouncing different words, the emphasis is diminished.

<sup>†</sup> The fuge may be considered as very difficult to manage with propriety. Handel, Purcell, Croft, Dr. Arnold, and others have introduced it advantageously. They have generally practised the method of suspending one or more parts on long notes, while the others were jointly pronouncing short notes. Perfect specimens of the fuge may be seen in Handel’s Grand Hallelujah, in Purcell’s anthem, “*Blessed is he,*”<sup>§</sup> and in Dr. Arnold’s Upton.

<sup>‡</sup> “That the soul may be affected, it is necessary that the sound should imply, or bring before us, something which we can comprehend.” Vossius on Poetry and Music. Page 72.

<sup>§</sup> The fuge is so important in music, that the writer thinks himself inexcusable, unless he should give a sample which he supposes to be correct.



But modern innovators have not stopped here. From the midnight revel, from the staggering bachanal, from the profane altar of Comus they have stolen the prostituted air, and, with sacrilegious hands, have offered it in the temple of JEHOVAH.\* Such profanation must wound every feeling heart. Devotion ever assumes a dignity. It cannot delight in the tinkling bustle of unmeaning sounds.† The air of a catch, a glée, a dance, a march, or a common ballad is very improper, for the worship of the MOST HIGH.‡

As the taste and practice of music have a great influence on our religion and morals, every person is under the most solemn obligations to use all his exertions for the suppression of that which is improper. "Let me," said Voltaire, "write the common ballads for any nation, and I will make their religion what I please." If the common songs of a nation can thus influence their religion, how much more their sacred music? Many respectable clergymen in New England, have been almost determined to omit music in public worship. To their great sorrow, they have observed, that the effects of a most solemn discourse were often obliterated, by closing with improper music. We cannot doubt the correctness of this idea. Let every friend of religion use his utmost exertions to remove this Achan from the sacred camp. Let not this Dagon of impiety be permitted to stand in the presence of the holy ark.

bed, make thou all his bed, all, all, all, all, all his bed in his sickness.

make thou all his bed, make thou all his bed, all, all, all, all, make thou all his bed in his sickness.

See A. Williams's Select Anthems. Page 28, Fol. Another beautiful specimen of the fugue may be seen in an Anthem written by J. Clark, and Green, "*Tell ye the daughters of Jerusalem,*" &c. in page 32 of the same selection.

\* If any person will take the trouble of examining the songs in the Beggars' Opera, he will find from what sources many of our modern tunes are derived.

† "There are also certain psalm tunes, which, with little merit as technical performances, are enabled to excite in the mind a great degree of devotional ecstasy. Those of the hundredth and the hundred and fourth psalms, are the most popular music in England; and they are no less adapted to excite a spirit of piety, than to soothe the ear with their simple melody." Knox's Essay on Music. Page 296.

‡ It may, perhaps, be observed, that sound is only the vehicle we use to convey ideas; and that one tune is as good as another. But will any person say that a theatre is as proper for public worship as any place?







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